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George Herbert MEAD, *Mind Self & Society. The Definitive Edition*

Edited by Charles W. Morris. Annoted Edition by Daniel R. Huebner and Hans Joas, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2015

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1 The publication of G. H. Mead's *Mind Self & Society. The Definitive Edition* has been long awaited by scholars and historians of the thought of the philosopher and pragmatist social psychologist. The editorial project of the University of Chicago Press followed this Definitive Edition with the publication of *The Timeliness of George Herbert Mead* (2016), a collection of the proceedings of the international conference held in April 2013 at the University of Chicago, also edited by Hans Joas and Daniel Huebner and already reviewed in this Journal (IX, 2, 2016).

2 The re-edition of *Mind, Self & Society* is one of the most valuable achievements of the collaboration of Huebner and Joas. It offers a fundamental contribution to the 'Mead Renaissance' unfolding in various disciplinary fields – from philosophy to psychology, from sociology to cognitive sciences – behind which there is a historiographic and theoretical intent to rehabilitate George H. Mead's thought as one of the great classics of American philosophical, psychological and sociological thought.

3 As is well known, *Mind, Self & Society* is Mead's second posthumous volume. It is the work of Morris's impressive editorial work, which brings together "twelve sets of classroom materials (stenographers' transcripts, students' notes, and students' class papers)" of the Advanced Social Psychology course held in 1928 and 1930 (with references in the notes

also to Morris's notes taken during the course of 1924), and "at least eight different manuscript fragments written by George H. Mead" (p. 391).

4 The new edition of 2015, with a foreword by Joas, presents also an appendix on Mead's sources thanks to rigorous work by Huebner. The appendix is, indeed, the real treasure of this new edition, the text of which, with the numbering of the pages, remains the same as the 1934 edition, with some correction of misprints included in the first edition. Huebner's reconstruction offers an insight into Morris's editorial work, which is noteworthy, given that it is thanks to him that Mead's thought has become known to most; but in some respects, Morris misguides us by introducing questionable interpretative canons to the reader in a way that is perhaps too invasive. The critical analysis of sources such as that carried out by Huebner allows us to remodel and relocate this work of Mead within an overall assessment of his production.

5 The first and most obvious example of Morris's editorial invasiveness that Huebner highlights is the definition of 'social behaviorist' that in the first chapter Morris attributes to Mead. As Huebner notes, at many points of the first chapter of *Mind, Self & Society*, "the wording of the source material has been modified so as to draw a sharper distinction between Mead's meaning of the term 'behaviorism' and a 'narrow,' or Watsonian, understanding of the term" (397). So intrusive is Morris's 'editing' that at the end of the ninth paragraph he adds the sentence "Our behaviorism is a social behaviorism," just as he adds all the occurrences of the expression 'social behaviorism' present in the volume. As is well known, Mead had clearly distinguished his position from Watson's since the 1920s. He repeatedly stressed the importance of the use of behavioral psychology for the understanding of the mental processes of the human being. However, he also specified that the observation of behavior should be considered as one of the methods of psychology, not the only one: it is inevitable to take the observation of behavior as a starting point, but one cannot *a-priori* deny consciousness because there is no agreement on the meaning of this term. As this passage from the appendix explains: "To account for them [i.e., mind or consciousness] thus is not to reduce them to the status of non-mental psychological phenomena, as Watson supposes – is not to show that they are not really mental at all; but is simply to show that they are a particular type of behavioristic phenomena, or one type of behavioristic phenomena among others" (399). Furthermore, it is worth noting that in a lecture on behaviorism in *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, one of a series that Mead delivered in 1928 and which were subsequently edited into book form by Merritt H. Moore in 1936, he distinguished two perspectives from which to consider the notion of 'behavior': the Watsonian perspective, according to which the process of the organism is seen from an external point of view; and the Deweyan perspective, which also includes in human behavior the different values associated with the notion of 'consciousness.' In particular, the Deweyan perspective, which interprets consciousness in functional terms as an experience of the interaction of the individual with the physical and social environment, allows us to overcome the reductionist pattern of stimulus-response – an echo of the ancient dualism between sensation and idea – and to consider human conduct as the active product of the inhibition of actions initially correlated to physiological impulses.

6 Other important points that Huebner reports include Mead's reference to Darwin which has been omitted from the chapter "The Behavioristic Significance of Gestures," and a reformulation of the explanation of emotion in the fourth chapter, as well as a passage concerning the physiology of attention (404). Related to this last topic is a very

interesting formulation of the problems of parallelism omitted from the chapter on "Parallelism and the Ambiguity of 'Consciousness'." Here Mead states: "If we are going to restrict the field of consciousness to that which psychology deals with we have left an organism which is stated in physical, or if you like in physiological, terms and the rest of the field of our experiences is brought within the range of so-called consciousness. This content, however, is one which we cannot completely bring within the range of our psychological investigation. We can't get it completely out of the field of physiological science" (406). Mead then continues by highlighting the ambiguity with which parallelism considers consciousness: "If we are to be quite consistent in it we have to regard the physiological system simply as a group of electrons and neurons and take out of it all the meanings that attached to them as specific physiological objects and lodge them in a consciousness. We find difficulty even with that. But supposing we did, we could not have the sort of physiological organisms which the physiologist implies as a counterpart of the psychological process. We could get all of consciousness on one side and on the other side a purely physical organism that has no content of consciousness at all" (407).

7 In a further passage omitted from chapter thirty on "The basis of human society: man and insects," Mead resumes the theory of the importance of the human hand that will then play an even more important role in the perceptual theory found in *The Philosophy of the Act* (1938): "A beefsteak, an apple, is a thing. It may be the stimulus which sets the process going, but it is a thing. There is a category under which you can bring all these stimuli which are qualitatively different but they are all things. The hand, with the erect posture of the human animal, is something in which he comes in contact, something by which he grasps. [...] It is that utilization of the hand within the act which has given to the human animal his world of physical things" (462).

8 Other interesting aspects concern the complex nuances Mead places on the distinction between 'I' and 'Me' and on the partially unpredictable character of the 'I' with respect to 'Me' (455), as well as on the relationship between self and the situational context (472). Moreover, the ambiguity highlighted by Huebner in the use of the expressions 'universal discourse' and 'universe of discourse' (451-2) is particularly evident. Concerning this and other points, Huebner notes how difficult it is to determine how much Mead contributed to their formulation. It is quite clear, in fact, that the stenographer has misunderstood or mis-transcribed certain points and Morris's hand has added ambiguity to ambiguity with the intention of correcting them.

9 In addition to highlighting Morris's heavy editorial work, the additional explanations Mead provided following the questions the students asked him, in which he offered "a unique standpoint on Mead's teachings" (392), are useful for orientation in Mead's work. Worthy of note, for example, is the additional discussion Mead offers about the mechanism of language learning and the contrast between language learning in humans and birds: "The vocalizing which the individual makes in their beginning of the phonetic process are in a great many respects identical with those which it hears. There are emphasized, they are the ones that come back, select and repeat themselves. Here we have a mechanism out of which the significant symbol arises. You couldn't call, of course, the vocalization which you get in the parrot, under such conditions, significant symbols. They have no meaning to the parrot such as they have in human society. They do not enter into the process which these vocalizations mediate in the human society, but the mechanics of it is the same" (416).

10 Worth noting is also the answer, linked to this discussion, to a question not included in the published text, concerning the responses to stimuli, in which Mead argues that some vocal elements that have emotional reactions evoke the same responses in the person who emits it as in the person who receives it (416). Or again, the answer he offers to the following question: "Can an individual be conscious of an object without responding to it?" omitted from chapter 22 on "The 'I' and the 'Me'." Mead responds to the question by highlighting the need to clarify the meaning of consciousness: "As I have said the term 'conscious' is ambiguous, we use it sometimes when we simply mean the presence of the object in our experience and also where we have a definite conscious relation" (445). It depends on the type of responses to certain stimuli: certain responses are present in attitudes, and they are beginnings of reactions, responses to an object that are included in our experience. In this sense, there is consciousness of the object. To this explanation is linked the question: "Wouldn't you think we have a consciousness of physical self as well as a social self?," to which Mead answers that: "under ordinary circumstances we don't distinguish between our physical self and the social self. It is the physical self which is the social self. It is the self which has such and such expression, wears such and such clothes. That is the social self, because those go to make up the characters that call out the social responses" (446).

11 In the appendix to the text it is also possible to find many bibliographical references Mead used in his lectures. For example, in Mead's explanation of multiple personalities in the chapter on the constitution of the self (ch. 18, ¶ 11), the references to Morton Prince's *The Dissociation of a Personality* (1905) and *The Unconscious* (1914) are made explicit.

12 We cannot report here all the interesting details that, thanks to Huebner's work, become salient in Mead's volume. What must be reiterated is that the re-edition of such an important work in the philosophical, sociological and psychological panorama of the twentieth century offers an essential contribution to various disciplines that are now undergoing rapid change. As Joas states in the Foreword of this new edition, in "an age of rapid advances in cognitive and evolutionary psychology and of enormous public interest in a new 'naturalism,' Mead's ideas deserve greatest attention" (xii). Mead, in fact, is an author who can still offer a significant contribution to the development of the different socio-psychological disciplines. The recognition of the primary sources of the text and the precise identification of the editorial work make this new edition the point of reference for any scholar who wants to approach the work of Mead, and want to draw from it some crucial insights and critical reflections.

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